

# Review

## **Exposure to violence and other forms of crime – victim surveys 2005-2020**

The first nationwide victim surveys of Danes' exposure to crime were conducted in the early 1970s. National representative surveys of the 16-74-year olds' exposure to theft, vandalism, violence and threats of violence have been conducted annually since 2005.

As from 2008, the victim surveys have included questions on exposure to rape (formerly forced sexual intercourse).<sup>1</sup> As from 2018, there have also been questions about the exposure to cybercrime. As from 2019, questions about the respondents' exposure to sexual assault other than rape have also been included. Moreover, as from 2020, there have also been questions about psychological abuse. This report focuses on those surveys and where possible they are compared to former similar surveys.

Preliminary results relating to selected main trends from the victim surveys in 2005-2020 were published earlier this year (*Pedersen, Okholm & Balvig 2021*) while more comprehensive analyses are included in the report. The overall results of these analyses can be summarised as follows:

### **Theft and burglary**

In 2020, 8 per cent responded that they had been victims of theft within the past year which is statistically significantly fewer than the total number in the period from 2005 to 2019 and the number in the preceding year alone. With a confidence interval of 95 per cent, this corresponds to approximately 330,000-390,000 victims of theft.

Looking at the period since 2005, the propensity to report theft has been at a lower level in recent years. Of the respondents in 2020, 55 per cent of victims of crime had reported the offence to the police or the police had become aware of the offence in other ways. This share does not differ significantly from the share in 2019 but it is statistically significantly lower than the share in the earlier period from 2005 to 2019 overall. The propensity to report theft is lower among young people than among the elderly and increases with the value of the stolen items.

As from the 2012 victim survey, the extent of burglary is examined independently. In 2020, 2.4 per cent of Danes aged 16-74 responded that they had been victims of burglary in their private home within the past year, corresponding to 86,000-117,000 persons aged 16-74.

Overall, the propensity to report burglary was higher than for theft in general. Just under three out of four burglaries and attempted burglaries were reported to the police in 2020. As

<sup>1</sup> Robbery was formerly included as a question in the victim survey but was excluded in 2015 as it turned out that the responses to that question ended up comprising an array of other crimes than robbery.

in the case of theft, the propensity to report burglary increases with the value of the stolen goods.

### **Vandalism**

In 2020, 4 per cent responded that they had been victims of vandalism within the past year, corresponding to 160,000-200,000 persons. From 2005 to 2020, the share who perceived themselves as having been victims of vandalism was halved, which is a statistically significant change while the share in 2020 did not differ markedly from the previous year.

In 2020, the propensity to report vandalism corresponded to the rate seen in previous years. It was lowest among persons aged less than 25 and increased with the value of the property vandalised.

### **Violence**

In 2020, 1.3 per cent responded that they had been victims of violence within the past year. This number is not a statistically significant deviation from 2019 but it is significantly lower than the corresponding number for the period 2005-2019 and corresponds to 47,000-64,000 individuals aged 16-74 being victims of violence within the past year. Viewed in a long-term perspective, violence develops in spurts. In the interpretation of the development, allowance should be made for changes in what the population perceives as violence. It has been established that this has changed over a long period and today, a relatively larger share of the physical abuse that actually occurs is experienced and perceived as violence.

Several indicators of the gravity of violence show fluctuations, but the development in 2005 to 2020 is not unambiguous. Compared to the previous year, no statistically significant changes occurred in 2020 as regards the perceived gravity of violence, in the share of victims who consider the violent incident to be a criminal act nor in the share of violent incidents that have resulted in visible injuries or bruises as measured in the past five years (2016-2020) compared with the previous 5-year period (2011-2015).

The propensity to report violence has varied during the period under review with no obvious development trend. In 2020, no statistically significant change was seen in the propensity to report violence compared to the year before.

In 2020, a little more than every fifth victim of violence responded that the crime committed against them was definitely motivated by racism, homophobia or transphobia or the victim's (assumed) religious conviction.

### ***Intimate partner violence***

Of the total number of victims of violence in the period from 2005 to 2020, 7 per cent respond that the violence was committed by an existing or former partner. In 85 per cent of the cases, the victims were women. It is typical for intimate partner violence that it more frequently results in injuries, that it is more frequently perceived as being very serious and that the rate of revictimisation is greater than violence in general.



### ***Psychological abuse***

As from 2020, the victim survey has included questions about psychological abuse. The share who respond that they have been victims of psychological abuse within the five years preceding the time of completing the questionnaire was 6.8 per cent. In 2020, the share of respondents aged 16-74 who experienced themselves as being victims of psychological abuse within the year preceding the time of completing the questionnaire was 2.5 per cent. Accordingly, in 2020, between 97,000-120,000 of the 16-74-year olds had experienced themselves as being victims of psychological abuse in the past year.

### **Rape and other types of sexual assault**

The share of the female respondents who responded in 2020 that they had been victims of rape or attempted rape within the past year was 0.4 per cent while the share who responded that they had been victims of rape or attempted rape within the past five years was 2.4 per cent. Viewed over a 3-year period (2018-2020), an average 0.5 per cent of the women responded that they had been victims of rape or attempted rape within the past year, corresponding to about 11,800 p.a. With a confidence interval of 95 per cent, this corresponds to at least 9,400 and no more than 14,000 female victims of rape p.a. in the period under review.

In the interpretation of the development, allowance should be made for any changes in what women experience and perceive as violence as in the case of rape.

Victims of rape are generally fairly young. More than half are below the age of 25. Two thirds of the rapes took place in private homes while every sixth instance of rape took place outdoors in a public place.

According to the victims of rape, just under four out of ten offenders are existing or former partners which might be one of the explanations for the fairly low percentage of reported rapes. Just under every fourth rape is reported to the police. Nearly half of those who do not report rape stated the reason to be that they saw no reason to do so as they did not consider the incident to be a crime, that they did not believe that it mattered or that they had just not felt like reporting the incident.

### ***Other types of sexual assault***

The share of the population who in 2020 responded that they had been victims of sexual assault other than rape in within the past year was 1.2 per cent, corresponding to 44,000-60,000 individuals aged 16-74. In just under eight out of ten cases, sexual assault is committed against women. In just under half of the incidents, sexual assault involved sexual touching of any part of the body. 93 per cent of victims of sexual assault other than rape did not report the incident to the police.

### **Cybercrime**

The share of respondents who responded in 2020 that they had been victims of cybercrime within the past year was 5 per cent, corresponding to 178,000-208,000 individuals being victims of cybercrime. Including attempts at cybercrime, the share of victims was 12 per cent.

The greater part of cybercrime, excluding attempted cybercrime, concerns credit card misuse. Well over half of the victims had experienced being victims of credit card misuse. Further, just under one third were victims of fraud in connection with online purchases of goods/services, while a smaller share experienced themselves as being victims of social engineering fraud and/or misuse of personal data.

### **Overall: violence, theft and/or vandalism**

In 2020, 12 per cent responded that they had been victims of violence, theft and/or vandalism within the past year compared to 14 per cent in 2019. This share has declined markedly over a long-term period. The share who had been victims of violence, theft and/or vandalism in 2020 was statistically significantly lower than the share in 2019 and the share for the earlier period from 2005-2019 overall.

### **Concerns about crime**

In 2020, 10 per cent responded that they often or nearly constantly thought about the risk of *becoming victims of crime themselves*. This share is statistically significantly lower than the share in the prior year but no obvious development trend emerged over the period. The concern about becoming a victim of crime oneself is closely related to whether the person has previously been a victim of crime and to gender as more women are concerned about this than men. As regards age, a larger share of the 25-74-year olds are never or rarely concerned about becoming victims of crime themselves than the youngest age group. The difference is statistically significant.

In 2020, the share who was *concerned about violence and crime in society* was 14 per cent which is statistically lower than the share in 2019 and the share for 2015-2019 overall. The population's concern about crime in society is closely related to gender as women are more concerned about this than men. Further, it is of importance whether the person has been a victim of crime him or herself. Moreover, a significantly larger share of the 25-74-year olds than of the younger group are very concerned about violence and crime in society.

### **COVID-19 and lockdowns**

The majority of the survey questions deal with the exposure to crime within the past 12 months preceding the time of completing the questionnaire and the surveys are conducted during the year. Accordingly, the survey for 2020 comprises periods of lockdown due to COVID-19. The lockdowns may have had an impact on the development in crime which is illustrated in the present survey. For example, the rate of thefts and burglaries was at the lowest level recorded in the victim surveys. Further, the share of violent incidents in private homes was at the highest level recorded. As regards the share who are concerned about violence and crime in society, the rate in 2020 was the lowest recorded in the victim surveys.

The results may be impacted by the fact that the time spent at home increased during the lockdowns while the time spent in public space declined. Similar trends were seen in other surveys (*Mannov et al. 2020* and *Gerell et al. 2020*).

However, not all results in the present survey point in the expected direction. For example, no increase was detected in the exposure to cybercrime as compared to 2019 while this was the case in the UK where a survey shows a sharp increase in the number of reported cases of various types of cybercrime following the lockdowns (*Kemp et al. 2021*).

